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ABSTRACT

Today's society is marked by the effects of globalization and an ever-increasing diversity of culture and language. Adding to the pace of change are the proliferating multimedia and information technologies. These phenomena are shaping the way in which meaning is created and exchanged, and they are generating a dynamic plurality of texts. The "multiliteracies" idea addresses some of the major dimensions of these changes in the contemporary communications environment. But what is meant by multiliteracies and how is it taught? This PEN digest provides a straightforward explanation of the term and the teaching practices that go with it, supported by two unit outlines from intermediate grade classrooms--one unit is on multimedia communication, and the other unit is on popular music. (NKA)

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1

Multiliteracies: Teaching and learning in the new communications environment

MARY KALANTZIS BILL COPE [illegible]ATHER FEHRING

What's meant by 'multiliteracies'? How do you 'teach' it? This PEN provides a straightforward explanation of the term and the teaching practices that go with it, supported by two unit outlines from middle-years classrooms.

Times are changing, and fast. Our society is marked by the effects of globalisation and an ever-increasing diversity of culture and language. Adding to the pace of change are the proliferating multimedia and information technologies. These phenomena are shaping the way in which meaning is created and exchanged, and they are generating a dynamic plurality of texts.

The 'multiliteracies' idea addresses some of the major dimensions of these changes in our contemporary communications environment. Once, *literacy* could be understood as the business of putting words in sentences on pages, and doing this correctly according to the standard usage. Now, *literacies* are inevitably multiple, in two major ways:

- Many kinds of English literacy are at work in many different cultural, social or professional contexts. As much as English is becoming a global language, these differences are becoming ever more significant to our communications environment.
- Through new communications technologies, meaning is being made in ways that are increasingly multimodal. That is, written-linguistic modes of meaning interrelate with visual, audio, gestural and spatial patterns of meaning.

Key aspects of the new environment

To succeed in this society — to become adults who are able to function effectively within it — our students must learn to live with change. Some of the forces at work, and their impacts on our understanding of literacy, are:

- *Technology:* Literacy figures more largely in the new wave of technologies than it did in any previous wave, in the form of software-mediated machinery, screen-based interfaces and multimedia communication technologies. These technologies generate new text forms that current literacy pedagogies are often ill-equipped to address.
- *Work:* Higher levels of literacy are becoming more critical in a wider range of occupations, including the processes and procedures of quality assurance, team and cross-organisational communication, continuous workplace-based learning and competency evaluation.
- *Visual communication:* Literacy is increasingly linked to visual communication, including, for instance, multimedia interfaces, 'user-friendly' screen-based technologies, word-processing and desktop-publishing.

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- *Diversity:* The profusion of print and other media channels leads to finer and more significant subcultural differentiation of specialist texts. These subcultures have complex definitions as dimensions such as gender, sexual orientation, fashion, age and ethnic identity interoperate, along with the registers and discourses that characterise specialist areas of work, hobbies and interests.
- *Global English and multiple Englishes:* English is fast becoming a world language; at the same time, its internal variations are more becoming more significant — subcultural, national, professional and the like. This means that literacy teaching in English that focuses on a single national 'standard' and 'correct usage' is rapidly becoming redundant.
- *Social mobility and social progress:* As a critical element in the education process, literacy still represents one of the best chances for individual upward mobility. It is thus one of the pivotal points at which a democratic society can prove that the promise of equal opportunity is more than rhetorical.

  As a consequence (and given the enormous new pressure on literacy outlined in the points above), there is a growing public and professional anxiety that education should perform and 'produce the literacy goods'.

If we follow these ideas through to the world of literacy teaching and learning, two questions arise:

- What do we teach now?
- How do we teach it?

The 'what' of multiliteracies

Instead of teaching rules of standard use, the multiliteracies framework focuses on 'designs of meaning' — designs which involve the identities of all meaning-makers, which will not always be the same, and which are not necessarily or rigidly 'right' or 'wrong'. Meanings either or work or don't work for a particular social or cultural context.

These days, exchanges of meaning are rarely just linguistic. They are almost invariably multimodal. Consider, for instance, word-processing, desktop-publishing, multimedia presentations, the written words on television, and so on.

Modes of meaning

Linguistic Visual Audio Gestural Spatial

Multimodal = combinations of the above.

The 'how' of multiliteracies

There are four elements of teaching practice in the multiliteracies pedagogy. Over the following pages, you will find two lesson plans illustrating this pedagogy at work.

Multiliteracies pedagogy

Situated practice *Immersion in experience*	*Either* the various knowledge, interests and experiences students bring to school (e.g. ways of communicating) *or* immersion in new experiences that are familiar and make at least half sense when introduced to learners.
Overt instruction *Describing patterns in meaning*	Explicit teaching, e.g. uncovering the underlying patterns in meaning and communication.
Critical framing *Locating purpose*	Explaining purposes, i.e. what a piece of communication is for. To get what done? For whom? Why?
Transformed practice *Adding meaning*	Applied learning. Real-world meanings, communication in practice, applying understandings to a new context.

None of this is meant to imply that teachers will have to add a whole lot of new content into their existing curriculum. On the contrary, as the following unit outlines demonstrate (pp 4–7), the multiliteracies idea simply provides a framework for rethinking literacy curriculum.

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Finding out more about multiliteracies pedagogy

Resources for teachers

If you want to become more involved with the multiliteracies framework, you might:

- attend the Literacy and Education Network Conference on Learning, which is now held annually. For details, visit **www.LearningConference.com**
- undertake postgraduate studies at RMIT University
- arrange a two-hour to one-day RMIT University training program for your school staff
- read some of the references suggested below, some of which can be purchased at the website of the Centre for Workplace Communication and Culture (**www.WorkplaceCultures.com**).

Further reading

Cope, W & Kalantzis, M (Eds) (2000) *Multiliteracies: Literacy Learning and the Design of Social Futures*. Routledge, London.

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New London Group (Cazden, C, Cope, W, Kalantzis, M et al.) (1996) 'A Pedagogy of Multiliteracies: Designing Social Futures'. *Harvard Educational Review* 66 (1).

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Unit outline 1

Multimedia communication

Focus question

How do people get their message across?

Modified from a unit of work for Year 5/6 by Marie Quinn, Mary MacKillop Primary School, Keilor Downs, Vic.

Intended learning outcomes

Students will be able to:

- demonstrate knowledge of the structure and purpose of different media text types
- demonstrate an understanding of the nature of cultural and social influences on textual messages.

Learning experiences: Key

Situated practice	exposure to *real-world texts and texts in students' lives*
Overt instruction	talking about *how the texts work*
Critical framing	talking about *what the texts are for*
Transformed practice	*making and using texts* (doing something with them), applying the new knowledge about texts

Learning sequence

Situated	Students collect a variety of media texts — newspapers, magazines, websites, advertisements, video clips — and examine the different presentation styles and content. Discussion: What is the message of each type of text? For whom is the message intended? How is the material presented?
Overt	Students form small focus groups, choosing a theme and a text type to examine. For example, a focus-group question might be: 'How do politicians get their message across?'. Students would begin by collecting political flyers, newspaper articles, TV clips and websites to analyse critically. Discussion centring on how each text is presented, by whom, for whom, how the content is constructed, what specific linguistic structures and features are used to construct the message in each text type, and what types of visual content are included.
Critical	Discussion: Each focus group constructs a concept map illustrating the connection between audience, style, content, presentation format, language, imagery etc.
Situated	Focus groups share the results of their critical analysis with the whole class. For example: What information do politicians include, and why? What style of language is used, and why? What impressions do the images create?
Overt	Whole-class discussion of the different text styles. Draw special attention to the different purposes behind each media type, and the relationship between language and power in society. Point out ways in which language and images are manipulated to convey positive or negative impressions.
Critical	Students reflect on such issues as: • Who is the intended audience for each style of communication? • Does the presentation of each text type differ because of the perceived audience? If so, why does this relationship exist? • How influential are the visual images upon the intended message? • What linguistic structures and features are used, and what effect does such language have on the message communicated in each text type?
Transformed	Students create their own textual message — for example, their own political flyer, a website for a band, a magazine article about a new wonder drug, an advertisement for a new computer, or a newspaper article about a disaster. The results of this construction will demonstrate the features analysed in the 'overt' and 'critical' sections of the unit, and will culminate in an exhibition of the textual messages produced.

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Assessing learning outcomes

	Some things students can do
Situated practice: The student examines the different ways of knowing the meaning of textual messages. S/he develops a language to discuss the features of visual and written texts.	Deconstruct textual messages, e.g. identify language and structural features that point to purpose, audience, mode and style of presentation Present joint findings orally and diagrammatically
Overt instruction: The student is able to identify features of persuasion in terms of written language, layout and visual content. S/he is able to analyse critically the purpose and intended audience of a text.	Demonstrate an understanding of the structure and features of language, e.g. classify adjectival forms in a negative–positive continuum Demonstrate an understanding of the power of visual content, e.g. describe the effects of imagery in terms of negative/positive association
Critical framing: The student is able to reflect upon the impact of different messages contained in different texts. S/he examines powerful pieces of information for different audiences.	View and critically review the messages contained in a variety of media, e.g. revise a sketched concept map as a digital text that highlights relationships between sound, language, imagery and purpose/audience
Transformed practice: The student is able to plan, design and construct messages for a variety of purposes and for different audiences.	Manipulate language to create a desired message, e.g. record a party-political announcement Use visual elements to enhance the meaning of a message, e.g. build a web page that orientates a rock band towards a targeted audience

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Unit outline 2

Popular music

Focus question

How are different kinds of meanings communicated?

Based on a unit of work developed by Fran Hodges for a Year 7 class at William Ross High School, Townsville, Qld.

Intended learning outcomes

Students will be able to:

- identify the ways in which linguistic, audio, visual and gestural meanings are interconnected in the design of popular music and video clips
- identify the conventions of poetry/song
- locate different musical genres in relation to different cultures and different kinds of taste.

Learning experiences: Key

Situated practice	exposure to *real-world texts and texts in students' lives*
Overt instruction	talking about *how the texts work*
Critical framing	talking about *what the texts are for*
Transformed practice	*making and using texts* (doing something with them), applying the new knowledge about texts

Learning sequence

Situated	Students examine the written lyrics of a Powderfinger song.
Overt	Through discussion, draw attention to how are the lyrics presented (verses, chorus, repetition, rhyming, alliteration — the conventions of song and poetry).
Critical	Discussion: What kind of song do you think this is? For what kind of audience? From the lyrics, what kind or genre of music do you think this song belongs to? What do you think the music will sound like?
Situated	Students listen to a recording of the song.
Overt	Through discussion, draw attention to features of the music (instruments, arrangement, beat, volume, how the voice of the singer relates to the music — how the song is made to sound the way it does).
Critical	Discussion: How does the music fit with the lyrics? Does it tell you more about the intended audience than just the lyrics? Which radio station would be most likely to play a song like this? What kind of listeners does this radio station cater for? What do you think the video clip is going to look like?
Situated	Students watch the video clip of the song.
Overt	Teacher-directed discussion of the images in the video clip — colours, camera angles, cuts/pans.
Critical	Discussion: How does the video clip fit with the music and the lyrics? What kind of audience is the clip appealing to? How would you classify this kind of music — what genre?
Situated	Introduction to a music survey: What different kinds of music do people in the class like?
Transformed	Conduct a class music survey by collating responses to the following. **Music survey** 1. What are your five favourite songs? Song — Artist No. 1: .... No. 2: .... No. 3: .... No. 4 .... No. 5: ....

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2. What style is each of these songs?

No. 1: .....

No. 2: .....

No. 3: .....

No. 4: .....

No. 5: .....

3. What is your favourite style of music?

.....

4. Describe what is typical of your favourite style

Lyrics: .....

Music: .....

Video: .....

Situated	Individual students choose their own favourite genre and song.
Overt	Analyse the design features of some preferred genres: the lyrics, the music and the video clip.
Critical	Compare and contrast the designs of different students' preferred songs. Why do different people like different kinds of music? What does it tell us about the kinds of people they are?
Transformed	Write the lyrics for a song. Write music to accompany the song. Perform the song. Make a video clip to go with the song (more ambitious, involving groups of students who like the same genre).

Assessing learning outcomes

	Some things students can do
Situated practice: The student makes sense of lyrics, music and video clips.	Decode, e.g. clarify word meanings, symbolism, instrumentation Comprehend, e.g. relate the narrative formed by sequencing lyrical, musical and/or visual chunks
Overt instruction: The student has a meaningful way to describe the processes and patterns in the design of lyrics, music and video clips.	Define design concepts, e.g. develop a language to identify structural features such as verse, chorus, refrain, compositional features such as long/mid/close-up shot and/or musical/vocal features such as chord progression, riff, key change, scat Use design concepts, e.g. predict the likely arrangement of a song based on lyrical and visual cues
Critical framing: The student shows that they know what the different music designs are for — audiences and purposes.	Make links between musical texts and their audiences, e.g. predict the demographics of various radio stations and allocate songs to their playlists
Transformed practice: The student effectively reproduces a musical genre, or shows creativity and originality.	Use texts to do things, e.g. compose a song with a specific listener in mind, such as a 12-year-old urban-Australian boy, a 50-year-old rural-Australian woman Make real-world meanings, e.g. manipulate the meaning of a fixed set of lyrics by changes in lyrical emphasis, musical accompaniment or visual referencing

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About the Multiliteracies Project

The Multiliteracies Project began in September 1994, when the ten original members of what has since become known as the New London Group met for a week in New Hampshire, USA, to formulate a new research agenda for literacy teaching and learning. The result was a programmatic paper 'A Pedagogy of Multiliteracies', published in the Spring 1996 issue of the *Harvard Educational Review*. The group consisted of:

- *Prof. Courtney B Cazden*, Charles William Eliot Professor of Education Emerita at the Harvard Graduate School of Education in the USA. She is a member of the US National Academy of Education, and a past president of the Council on Anthropology and Education and the American Association of Applied Linguistics. Amongst her many publications is the classic *Classroom Discourse*.
- *Dr Bill Cope*, Director of the Centre for Workplace Communication and Culture, RMIT University and a co-editor and co-author of *The Powers of Literacy* (see page 3 refs).
- *Prof. Norman Fairclough*, Professor of Language in Social Life in the Departments of Linguistics and Modern English Language at Lancaster University, UK. Amongst his best-known books are *Discourse and Social Power* and *Media Discourse*.
- *Prof. James Paul Gee*, Tashia Morgridge Chair in Reading in the Department of Curriculum and Instruction at the University of Wisconsin, Madison, USA. Among his most influential books are *The Social Mind* and *Social Linguistics and Literacies*. He is currently undertaking extensive work on adolescent literacies.
- *Prof. Mary Kalantzis*, Dean of the Faculty of Education, Language and Community Services at RMIT University, Melbourne, and a co-editor and co-author of *The Powers of Literacy* (see page 3 refs).
- *Prof. Gunther Kress*, Professor of Education at the Institute of Education at the University of London, UK. He is best known for his books *Learning to Write* and *Reading Images*.
- *Prof. Allan Luke*, Dean of the Graduate School of Education, University of Queensland, and internationally recognised expert on critical literacy.
- *Dr Carmen Luke*, Associate Professor and teacher of sociology, communications and cultural studies and feminist theory at the Graduate School of Education, University of Queensland.
- *Prof. Sarah Michaels*, Professor of Education at the Jacob Hiatt Center for Urban Education at Clark University, MA, USA.
- *Dr Martin Nakata*, Aboriginal Research Institute, Faculty of Aboriginal and Islander Studies, at the University of South Australia, and an expert on indigenous literacy.

Since then, group members have presented regularly at the Literacy and Education Network Conferences on Learning, including those in Penang, Malaysia (1999), Melbourne (2000), and Spetses, Greece (2001). In 2000, the group published a book-length version of the multiliteracies case through Routledge in London.

In 1999, Bill Cope and Mary Kalantzis were joined by Heather Fehring, Adele Flood and Pam Green at RMIT University to work with teachers to trial classroom applications of the multiliteracies framework. This PEN is one result of this collaboration.

About the authors

Professor Mary Kalantzis is Dean of the Faculty of Education, Language and Community Services at RMIT University, Melbourne. She was a part-time Commissioner of the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission from 1994 to 1997, and Chair of the Queensland Ethnic Affairs Ministerial Advisory Committee from 1995 to 1997. She has been extensively published in the area of literacy and equity. Her latest book is an edited collection, with Bill Cope, based on the work of the New London Group (see page 3 references).

Dr Bill Cope is Director of the Centre for Workplace Communication and Culture at RMIT University, Melbourne. He was formerly First Assistant Secretary in the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, and Director of the Office of Multicultural Affairs. With Mary Kalantzis, he has recently edited the book *Multiliteracies: Literacy Learning and the Design of Social Futures* (see page 3 references). He has written widely in the area of Australian society and culture.

Dr Heather Fehring is a senior lecturer in language and literacy education in the Faculty of Education, Language and Community Services, RMIT University, Melbourne. She has been writing and researching for many years in the areas of spelling development and literacy assessment and reporting. Her PhD research involved investigating the influences on teachers' judgement of students' literacy development. Among her publications is a jointly authored book (1995) called *Keying into Assessment: Strategies, Case Studies, Classroom Management*.

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